

Pensions Act

discussion as it concerns the three categories might have been given had each been brought in separately. I know that in 1957 the hon. member for Essex East, the present Secretary of State for External Affairs, agreed with our program of bringing forward these resolutions immediately following the presentation and acceptance of the legislation regarding the old age security increase. I know that as the house agreed to pass the resolution preceding this bill without debate, it will demonstrate our complete unanimity on the fact that it should be proceeded with immediately, and will demonstrate our anxiety to get on with the matter. I only say that in my opinion it is a crying shame that the bill was not brought in before this.

The minister mentioned that the effective date of this bill was discussed at the conference, and that no province suggested an earlier date. I am convinced that at least the province of Manitoba earlier suggested moving on with this particular measure so that it would be brought in at an earlier date. If I am not mistaken the province of Ontario had also gone on record in this respect. Further, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that it is only brought in now as a result of the motion of the Leader of the Opposition on July 18 last to the effect that these benefits be separated from the over-all Canada pension plan.

It will be recalled that at that time the minister spoke with much firmness about the great qualities of the plan and what she envisaged. She, of course, envisaged an increase in old age security benefits effective this coming January 1. It was only on the insistence of the opposition and others that this particular approach was finally changed by the minister, or by the government, and on September 30 last when we reconvened after the recess we were consequently presented with a new bill to increase old age security by \$10 a month effective October 1. I see no reason why this increase of \$10 to the old age assistance recipients, the blind and the disabled, should not have been made available at that time.

In response to a question by the hon. member for Ontario on Monday last, reported on page 5321 of *Hansard*, the Prime Minister indicated that the question of the effective date was under consideration. As the federal-provincial conference had then concluded I felt we might have had an indication that this legislation would be made retroactive, if necessary, and that it would come into force on October 1 so these people would share on an equal basis. The Prime Minister also made this statement about the effective date, that—

—the provinces differed with regard to that matter. That must be ironed out before a statement can be made.

From what the minister said I took her to mean that the exact starting date was decided at the conference, whereas apparently the government has since made up its mind.

I feel that following the increase in old age security, legislation which was optional to the provinces should have been introduced immediately so that the provinces would have had the option as at that time to enter into an agreement to participate in these measures to the benefit of the various recipients in each province. I notice there is no new tax here as in the case of the old age security increase. Despite the fact that I may be considered somewhat out of order I should like to reiterate that the original election promise of this government was to the effect that these increases would be put through without any increase in taxes. However, this did not prevent the minister from presenting a bill adding 1 per cent to personal income taxes.

I should like to put on record, Mr. Speaker, one or two of our own accomplishments in regard to steps we took when we were in office. Effective November 1, 1957 we not only increased old age security payments by \$9 a month but also amended the three acts in question, the Old Age Assistance Act, the Blind Persons Act and the Disabled Persons Act. It will also be remembered that a very advantageous step to many residents of Canada was taken at that time in reducing the residence requirement from 20 to 10 years. This was a real achievement. At that time, of course, the allowable earnings were also increased proportionately. The blind received the same treatment; their benefits were increased from \$46 to \$55 per month and the allowable earnings increased by \$120 for a single person and \$240 for a married person. In 1957 the Disabled Persons Act was amended to increase the benefits from \$46 to \$55 per month and also coverage broadened to include certain persons in institutions.

I remember at that time a great deal of discussion among various members on both sides of the house to the effect that this particular act should have its requirements broadened so that more people suffering from various forms of disability could benefit under its terms. I expect we will hear more of that today; I hope we do because some further consideration should be given to the interpretation of what "totally and permanently disabled" means, and whether those words should or should not be altered. At that time about 90,000 people benefited from the increase in the old age assistance allowance. Today the minister mentioned 103,000. At that time about 8,300 persons were in receipt of pensions with respect to blindness. The minister mentioned that